

Message Text

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1476

INFO AMEMBASSY VALLETTA

USMISSION EC BRUSSELS

USMISSION GENEVA

AMEMBASSY ANKARA

AMEMBASSY ATHENS

AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN

AMEMBASSY LISBON

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY LUXEMBOURG

AMEMBASSY OSLO

AMEMBASSY OTTAWA

AMEMBASSY REYKJAVIK

AMEMBASSY ROME

AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE

USMISSION NATO

AMCONSUL BORDEAUX

AMCONSUL LYON

AMCONSUL MARSEILLE

AMCONSUL STRASBOURG

AMCONSUL NICE

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SUBJECT: PRESS REACTION TO PRESIDENT NIXON'S RESIGNATION

AND ASSUMPTION OF PRESIDENCY BY GERALD FORD

SUMMARY: FRENCH PRESS REACTION TO THE RESIGNATION HAS BEEN GENERALLY MILD, STRESSING THE PERSONAL TRAGEDY OF PRESIDENT NIXON, THE GREAT STRENGTH MANIFESTED BY AMERICAN INSTITUTIONS AND THE CONTINUITY OF U.S. FOREIGN POLICY ASSURED BY THE MAINTENANCE IN OFFICE OF SECRETARY KISSINGER. COMMENT ON PRESIDENT FORD HAS BEEN RESTRAINED AND HAS FOCUSED ON THE THEME OF AN ORDINARY MAN, A GOOD MAN, SUDDENLY FACED WITH VAST RESPONSIBILITIES. ALMOST ALL OF THE PRESS HAS MADE THE OBVIOUS COMPARISON TO THE LATE PRESIDENT TRUMAN. END SUMMARY

1. REACTION TO THE RESIGNATION.

(A) THE TRAGIC FLAWS: JEAN D'ORMESSON IN FIGARO CALLED PRESIDENT NIXON'S DEMISE "A MODERN TRAGEDY", WHICH NEVERTHELESS COULD SERVE AS A LESSON IN DEMOCRACY. HE ASKS WHETHER THE U.S. WILL TURN INWARD TO LICK ITS WOUNDS, OR NOW THAT THE EXPIATION IS ACCOMPLISHED, WILL RECOVER ITS GOOD HEALTH. L'AUREORE OBSERVES THAT PRESIDENT NIXON WAS BOTH AN AUTHORITATIVE MAN AND A LONER WHO AGONIZED IN PRIVATE OVER HIS RESIGNATION UNTIL THE SECRETARY OF STATE STRUCK THE PROPER TONE BY CONVINCING HIM THAT HIS ACHIEVEMENTS WOULD SURVIVE BEYOND WATERGATE. THE MOST SCATHING VIEW OF THE RESIGNATION COMES FROM LE MONDE'S CHIEF EDITOR ANDRE FONTAINE WHO OBSERVES THAT "WITHOUT THE GREAT NEED FOR TRUTH AND PURITY WHICH AT PRESENT IS TOUCHING AMERICANS TO THE CORE, THEY WOULD NOT HAVE CHASED FROM THE WHITE HOUSE THE MAN WHO HAS CONSISTENTLY LIED TO THEM FOR YEARS". CITING LINCOLN'S DICTUM ABOUT FOOLING ALL OF THE PEOPLE ALL OF THE TIME, FONTAINE NOTES THAT "RICHARD NIXON FALLS FOR HAVING FORGOTTEN THIS WISE PRECEPT." NEITHER COMMUNIST L'HUMANITE NOR CENTER-LEFT QUOTIDIEN DE PARIS CARRIES EXTENSIVE COMMENT ON PRESIDENT NIXON -- BOTH STATE THAT THE INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTS OF THE RESIGNATION ARE MORE IMPORTANT THAN THE PERSON OF RICHARD NIXON.

(B) SUMMING UP THE ACHIEVEMENTS: MOST OF THE UNCLASSIFIED

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PARIS PRESS PAY TRIBUTE TO NIXON'S SOLID ACHIEVEMENTS IN THE REALM OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS. FIGARO SAYS THAT WHEN THE DUST OF WATERGATE HAS SETTLED, HISTORIANS MAY WELL RANK NIXON AMONG "THE GREATEST PRESIDENTS IN THE HISTORY OF AMERICA" FOR IT WAS HE WHO EXTRACTED AMERICA FROM VIETNAM, "INVENTED KISSINGER," AND WHO INITIATED RAPPROCHEMENTS WITH CHINA, THE SOVIET UNION AND IN THE MIDDLE EAST. L'AUREORE'S PHILIPPE VERNERT STATES THAT

NIXON MIGHT DISAPPEAR BUT HIS WORK GOES ON; PERHAPS HIS LAST SERVICE TO THE NATION WILL HAVE BEEN THAT IN OVERCOMING ITS MOST SERIOUS CRISIS SINCE THE CIVIL WAR, THE AMERICAN PEOPLE WILL HAVE ONCE AGAIN PROVEN ITS WORTH TO ITSELF. JEAN D'ORMESSON (FIGARO) SAYS THAT EVEN IF RICHARD NIXON IS REALLY THE CRIMINAL DESCRIBED BY HIS ADVERSARIES, BY HIS ACHIEVEMENTS HE WILL NEVERTHELESS HAVE BEEN ABLE TO SHAKE THE UNIVERSE AS MUCH AS LINCOLN OR WASHINGTON AND SURELY A LOT MORE THAN TALLEYRAND OR MAZARIN. D'ORMESSON CONCLUDES THAT THE RESIGNATION IS ONE OF THE RESULTS OF A "COLLISION OF PURITAN MORALITY, WORLD POLITICS AND OUR FAMOUS 'MASS MEDIA.'"

2. THE FRENCH PERCEPTION OF PRESIDENT FORD.
ALMOST ALL THE DAILIES SKETCH PRESIDENT FORD AS

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AN UNKNOWN QUANTITY -- LE MONDE CALLS HIM "THE UNKNOWN FROM MICHIGAN" -- BUT ONE WHICH IS LIKELY TO CONTINUE NIXON'S FOREIGN POLICY. LIBERALLY QUOTING THE AMERICAN PRESS, FRENCH PAPERS CHARACTERIZE PRESIDENT FORD AS A GOOD MAN, A TEAM PLAYER, BUT LACKING A FIRST-CLASS MIND AND THE WILLINGNESS TO INITIATE NEW POLICIES. THE QUOTIDIEN DE PARIS SAYS "FORD WILL NOT BE INCOMPETENT, NO MORE SO THAN TRUMAN WAS" WHEN HE SUCCEEDED FDR. DESCRIBING FORD AS "A PRESIDENT IN SPITE OF HIMSELF", L'AUREORE CLAIMS THAT BEFORE HIS CHOICE AS VICE PRESIDENT LATE LAST YEAR HE WAS CONSIDERED IN WASHINGTON TO BE SLOWLY ON HIS WAY TO RETIREMENT. L'AUREORE CONTINUES THAT TEAM SPIRIT WILL NOW ENTER THE WHITE HOUSE IN PLACE OF THE MENTALITY OF THE "LONER" WHO IS LEAVING IT, AND FURTHER OPINES THAT AFTER YEARS OF SCANDAL AND VIETNAM TRAUMA, AFTER "THE EGGHEADS OF KENNEDY, THE NOUVEAUX RICHES OF JOHNSON AND THE PRUSSIANS AND FLORENTINES OF NIXON", THE WHITE HOUSE WILL UNDOUBTEDLY RECOVER A PEACEFULNESS WHICH MAY BE A BIT PONDEROUS BUT WHICH IS, ABOVE ALL, HEALING. FIGARO, IN A FULL PAGE BIOGRAPHICAL ESSAY, TRACES PRESIDENT FORD'S BACKGROUND AND DESCRIBES HIM (IN ENGLISH) AS "MR. CLEAN," A MAN ABOVE CRITICISM. FIGARO DESCRIBES FORD'S ATHLETIC PROWESS AND NOTES THAT HE IS MADE OF THE STUFF OF A "GOOD COACH". FINALLY, FIGARO RECALLS THE SKEPTICISM THAT GREETED THE ACCESSION TO THE WHITE HOUSE OF HARRY TRUMAN, AND NOTES THAT AT TRUMAN'S BURIAL LAST YEAR HE WAS PRAISED AS ONE OF THE GREATEST AMERICAN PRESIDENTS. ALL THE MAJOR PARIS DAILIES (WITH EXCEPTION OF HUMANITE) AGREE THAT FORD'S ANNOUNCEMENT THAT KISSINGER WOULD CONTINUE AS SECRETARY

OF STATE BETOKENS WELCOME CONTINUITY IN AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY.

3. THE INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTS.

ALMOST ALL THE PRESS VOIC SATISFACTION THAT AMERICAN INSTITUTIONS EMERGE STRENGTHENED FROM THE WATERGATE ORDEAL. MANY FRENCH DAILIES INSTRUCT THEIR READERS IN WATERGATE'S CONSTITUTIONAL COMPLEXITIES; FIGARO DEDICATES AN ENTIRE ARTICLE TO AN EXPLANATION OF THE WORKINGS OF THE 25TH AMENDMENT. QUOTIDIEN DE PARIS SOUNDS A COMMON NOTE IN OBSERVING THAT THE FATE OF UNCLASSIFIED

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DEMOCRACY WAS MORE AT STAKE IN THE WATERGATE CRISIS THAN THE FATE OF A SINGLE MAN. "THE PROBLEM, PRECISELY, WAS TO KNOW WHICH COUNTS MORE, INSTITUTIONS OR MEN. AMERICA HAS ANSWERED. SHE CHOOSES HER INSTITUTIONS AND SHE HAS NEVER DESERVED THEM SO MUCH." ANDRE FONTAINE (LE MONDE) SAYS THAT ALTHOUGH NO ONE REALIZED IT ANY MORE AND NO ONE WANTED TO BELIEVE IT, "THERE IS STILL AT LEAST ONE NATION ON THIS EARTH WHERE THE LAW IS UNDENIABLY STRONGER THAN MEN, WHERE JUDGES ONLY RECENTLY NAMED BY A PRESIDENT ARE CAPABLE OF ISSUING INDICTMENTS AGAINST HIM AND WHERE A PARTY CAN PREFER THE DEMONSTRATION OF JUSTICE TO THE MAINTENANCE IN POWER OF ONE OF ITS OWN." HE SOUNDS, HOWEVER, A CAUTIONARY NOTE IN SAYING THAT THE WATERGATE CRISIS HAS LEFT "PROFOUND WOUNDS IN THE BODY OF AMERICA AND IN THAT PART OF THE WORLD WHICH SHE DOMINATES." L'HUMANITE, AS EXPECTED, TAKES A DIFFERENT TACK, OBSERVING THAT THE FALL FIRST OF AGNEW AND THEN OF NIXON IS TO BE EXPECTED IN A CORRUPT REGIME WHERE THE DOLLAR RULES. HUMANITE GOES ON TO SAY THAT THE UNITED STATES IS HARDLY AN ADMIRABLE EXAMPLE OF DEMOCRACY WHEN ITS PRESIDENT AND THE MAN WHOM HE WILL NAME VICE PRESIDENT WERE NOT ELECTED BY THE PEOPLE OR THEIR REPRESENTATIVES. STONE

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